



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## ART. XI. — CRITICAL NOTICES.

1. — *Lectures on English Literature, from Chaucer to Tennyson.* By HENRY REED. Philadelphia: Parry & McMillan. 1855.

THE little volume, the title of which is given above, is a book full of beauty, taste, and learning. Henry Reed, its lamented author, was born in Philadelphia, in 1808, a grandson of the friend, companion, and correspondent of Washington. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts at the University of Pennsylvania in 1825, studied the law under Mr. Sargeant, and was admitted to the bar in 1829. Two years later, in 1831, he relinquished the legal profession, and accepted the office of Assistant Professor of English Literature in the University, and soon after was chosen Assistant Professor of Moral Philosophy. In 1835 he was elected Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature. For twenty years he continued in the assiduous discharge of his duties to the University, never being absent from his post, except on account of illness. In the spring of 1854, having long felt the natural desire of a scholar to visit the Old World, he asked and obtained leave of absence for that purpose. He sailed for Europe with Miss Bronson, his sister-in-law, early in May. In England he was received with the characteristic kindness of the cultivated society there. The family and friends of the late Dr. Arnold, with whom he had corresponded, the Wordsworths, Southey, Coleridge, Lord Mahon, and other persons distinguished by rank and literary accomplishments, showed their appreciation of his scholarly acquirements and the amiable qualities of his character, by the genial kindnesses which none know better how to extend to the stranger who is entitled to them. From England he went to the Continent, travelled through France and Switzerland, through the North of Italy, visiting Milan and Venice, and returned by the Tyrol to Innsbruck and Munich; thence down the Rhine to Holland, and so to England. "His last associations" (says his brother, the editor of the volume) "were with the cloisters of Canterbury (that spot, to my eye, of matchless beauty), the garden vales of Devonshire, the valley of the Wye, and the glades of Rydal. His latest memory of this earth was of beautiful England in her summer garb of verdure. The last words he ever wrote were in a letter of the 20th of September to his venerable friend, Mrs. Wordsworth, thanking her, and his English friends generally, for all she and they had done for him."

On that same day he embarked at Liverpool for New York, in the United States steam-ship *Arctic*. On the 27th of the same month, this ship, moving in a dense fog, at full speed, near Cape Race, along the thronged highway of the sea, on the track over which outward-bound and homeward-bound ships are constantly sailing, came into collision with another vessel, at noon, and in four hours afterwards went down. A disaster so awful filled the country with horror, and carried mourning, bereavement, and desolation into hundreds of homes. Men, women, and children, in sight of their native land, sank into the remorseless depths of the sea, and suddenly perished from among the living, victims to the unholy greed and impious rashness which have, in these latter years, strewn the bottom of the ocean with the bodies of their murdered victims. Among the victims on this most tragical occasion, there was no one whose death was a heavier public and private calamity than that of Henry Reed.

"It was that fatal and perfidious bark,  
Built in the eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,  
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine."

We quote with satisfaction the following words of Mr. William B. Reed, and thank him for having written and published them :—

"Nor can I conclude this brief narrative without the utterance of an opinion, expressed in no asperity, and not, I hope, improperly intruded here,—my opinion, as an American citizen, that, in all the history of wanton and unnecessary shipwreck, no greater scandal to the science of navigation, or to the system of marine discipline, ever occurred, than the loss of the *Arctic* and her three hundred passengers. There is but one thing worse, and that is the absence of all laws of the United States either to prevent the recurrence of such a catastrophe ; to bring to justice those, if there are any such, who are responsible ; or, at least, to secure a judicial investigation of the actual facts." — p. xxii.

We entirely coincide with the opinion thus expressed by Mr. Reed. We have had some opportunity of knowing how the dangerous region where this tragedy was enacted is crossed by careful and responsible navigators ; and we are entirely convinced, first, that had such a navigator been in command of the *Arctic*, the accident in all probability would not have happened ; and secondly, even if it had happened, that the ship and her precious freight of human lives would have come to land in safety. With these remarks, we pass on to our subject.

We know not the volume in American critical literature which contains more valuable and appreciating criticism than this. It consists of a course of Lectures, delivered by Professor Reed before the University and the public. They exhibit abundant proofs of the author's varied acquirements, sound scholarship, pure feelings, and exquisi-

site literary taste. Mr. Reed was a modest and retiring man, with a love for quiet and contemplative life, of gentle manners, and the most amiable disposition. All these moral and intellectual qualities shine out beautifully on every page of his book ; at the same time, they account for some opinions (very few indeed) on literary matters and literary men, which we think will not in the end meet with general acceptance. He was a lover of English poetry, and the spirit of it had entered into and taken possession of his soul. The English Muse, in her general purity, the love of nature with which she glows, the domestic affections which inspire so many of her nobler strains, is peculiarly in harmony with a mind so delicately attuned as that of Mr. Reed. But besides this general harmony between his own style of thought and feeling, and the spirit of English poetry, he had special affinities to that class of poets of which, in modern times, Wordsworth is the most illustrious representative. Accordingly, we find in his Lectures the name of Wordsworth dwelt upon with fondness, and fine passages cited from his works, with a genial and hearty love, which is after all the best kind of criticism. It is not a common thing to find these particular inclinations so strongly developed, and at the same time the mind endowed with such a catholic love of varied excellence as Mr. Reed himself preserved, and, in one of his most eloquent Lectures, inculcated on others. This is the special charm of his literary character ; intense love of *particular* forms of beauty, united with a hearty appreciation of *every* form of beauty.

The style of Mr. Reed's criticism is simple, and yet it is the result of conscientious study and deep thought. It is easily intelligible, but is not, for that reason, superficial. In the clearest waters we see the shining pebbles or silvery sands on the bottom, while shallow streams are sometimes so thick and turbid, that, while we see only the surface, we are cheated into the belief that they roll over unfathomable depths. The best writers of Athens are as transparent as the sparkling waters that sweep murmuringly into the basins they have hewn and polished in the shores of Attica, where you may count the glittering pebbles that inlay the marble floor.

Mr. William B. Reed, in giving a modest estimate of his brother's book, has underrated its real merits. Unpretending as it is, and simply as it is written, it embodies profound results, thoughtfully and studiously worked out, and beautifully worded. It contains a series of admirable criticisms on the English language and the principal authors in English literature. The Introductory Lecture is a valuable and thoroughly reasoned discussion of the Principles of Literature, full of philosophical thought, and of suggestions on reading, which would be

useful to any person desirous of being guided aright in the selection of books that shall fill his leisure hours with profitable as well as entertaining study. The same general remarks may be applied to the second Lecture, on the Application of Literary Principles. The third Lecture—that on the study of the powers of the English Language in prose and verse—gives the results of much reflection and learned research, in a style at once perspicuous and elegant. It would not be easy to find in so narrow a compass so much interesting information, with so much of fine analysis and beautiful illustration. The richness, variety, and expressiveness of our noble tongue are eloquently set forth, and the sources whence its unsurpassed wealth of expression is drawn, historically explained. Some of its peculiarities—such as that almost inexplicable mystery to foreigners, the difference between *shall* and *will* as auxiliaries in the formation of the future,—are ingeniously accounted for, by quite original explanations. The Lecture on Early English Literature contains a very beautiful and characteristic description of Chaucer's genius and style, and abounds in the most delicate appreciation of the sweet and natural graces of his *Canterbury Tales*. In closing this topic, the author falls into a strain of eloquent discourse upon the changes and the decay of language. “The most wondrous mortality the world witnesses is the dying of language.” His remarks on the subject are singularly striking and impressive,—nay, even solemn. The first sentence in the following passage, for picturesque beauty, is hardly to be surpassed:—

“So must it ever be as long as a cloud of divine displeasure travels onward with the earth, casting down upon it a dark shadow; and hence no language, no matter how lofty its literature may be, can boast a privilege from decay:

‘Babylon,  
Learned and wise, hath perished utterly,  
Nor leaves her *speech* one word to aid the sigh  
That would lament her.’

“The Pyramids, mysterious in their unnumbered centuries, are standing almost as imperishable as the Nile, and yet not one word survives that was spoken by the tens of thousands who toiled in building them:

‘Egyptian Thebes,  
Tyre by the margin of the sounding waves,  
Palmyra, central in the desert, fell’;—

and all their dialects are silent as the desert sands. That noble language, too, of antiquity, with which Athens sent forth her philosophy and poetry to the islands of the *Ægean* and the shores of Asia, and ‘fulminated over Greece with her resistless eloquence,’—the language that Corinth, from her famous isthmus, spake over the eastern and western waves, has, for many ages, known no other existence than that which it holds on the pages of books.

The speech of the Roman,—the language of empire and of law, spread by consul and emperor till it was stayed by the ocean and the barbarian,—how has it ceased to hold companionship with the voice, and learned men of modern times can only conjecture respecting its accent! ”— pp. 144, 145.

Beautifully argued, and true in one aspect; but, in another point of view, it may be answered that nothing is so entirely indestructible as language. Even Babylon is unlocking the secrets of her speech, through the wedge-formed inscriptions on her bricks, to the researches of Rawlinson, Hincks, Burnouf, and Lassen; the Egyptian Sphinx has long since allowed her riddle to be read, and Lepsius has printed a book of Egyptian Literature, with movable types; while in Athens herself, within an arrow-shot of the Lyceum of Aristotle, learned teachers discourse to eager classes of young Hellenes, in an Attic language which the great philosopher of antiquity would not disdain to own as his mother tongue.

The Lecture on the Literature of the Sixteenth Century contains admirable sketches of Surrey, Sackville, Shakespeare, Sidney, Spenser, Bacon, and the other stars that make up the unequalled constellation which shone upon that great age. The sixth Lecture—that on the Literature of the Seventeenth Century—treats with equal taste and ability of the great prose-writers, and the early poems of Milton. The criticism of the *Comus* is exquisite. In the following Lecture, the old age of Milton, and the brilliant period of Dryden, together with Addison, Pope, Bolingbroke, Gray, Collins, Cowper, and Goldsmith, are discussed. The remaining Lectures are devoted to the Literature of the Nineteenth Century; Contemporary Literature; Tragic and Elegiac Poetry; the Literature of Wit and Humor; and the Literature of Letter-Writing. We have no space to enlarge on any of the themes suggested by this splendid array of subjects; and can only say, that they are all handled with feeling, ability, and elegance. In many of our New England schools, of the higher grades, the critical study of English literature has within a few years taken a prominent place. The careful reading of this volume—in parts more than once repeated—has brought us to the conclusion, that the purity of taste, correctness of judgment, deep and sound religious feeling, that mark its pages so strongly, and yet so unobtrusively, are precisely the qualities that make it suitable—more suitable than any book we remember—to be introduced into the schools for the purpose of being read in connection with the study of the great masterpieces of our literature; and we should not hesitate to recommend it to our friends and brethren in the ranks of teachers, confident that it would contribute at once to the refinement of the taste and sensibility of the young, and

help to kindle their admiration and enthusiasm for all that is lovely in literature, and noble in conduct and character.

---

2.— *The Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington.* By R. R. MADDEN, M. R. I. A., Author of *Travels in the East*, etc., etc., etc. New York: Harper and Brothers. 1855. 2 vols. 24mo. pp. 547, 599.

THE name of Dr. Madden has been familiar to us for many years, in a ghostly sort of way, as the author of sundry unreadable books, and a hanger-on of titled people in different parts of the world. The present work is saved, by the interest that attaches to many literary names occurring in it, from the awful obscurity into which his other works dropped stillborn from the press. The principal heroine is of course Lady Blessington; but she could not, of herself, have sufficed to rescue these ponderous tomes from the fate of their predecessors. A lady whose early career is surrounded by a mythical cloud, from which she emerged into the false glare of a middle age of extravagance and vanity, leading to disastrous overthrow and flight, can hardly be an object of permanent interest to sober, thinking people. She first became known in this country by the glowing descriptions in Mr. Willis's *Pencilings by the Way*. Others have since helped to blazon her personal and mental charms, and her literary genius. She aspired to be a leader of society; but her circle included only men. The ladies of England may be, as they have been, accused of prudery, by those who desire to lower the tone of society by lessening the rigor of its moral laws; but to their honor be it said, they have steadily maintained the dignity of their sex, by withholding their countenance socially from those who have tarnished the jewel of their souls. Literary and accomplished *Aspasia*s may gather around themselves men of talent and genius; they may dazzle by their luxury, and fascinate by the graces of their conversation; but there is a barrier of womanly displeasure which hems them in, and which, in English society, they cannot overpass. Lady Blessington, after many years of more than Oriental extravagance passed on the Continent, in which her husband, a weak-minded absentee Irish landlord, squandered the revenues drawn from his wretched tenantry on costly palaces, and gilded furniture, and sybaritic dinners, returned to London, with Count D'Orsay, the separated husband of her husband's daughter, and there, upon a moderate jointure, made the vain attempt